

With the trail of Osama bin Laden gone cold, the U.S. State Department is revving up a new publicity blitz to remind Afghans and Pakistanis of the \$25 million bounty for al-Qaeda's chief. Bin Laden is still thought to be hiding somewhere along the 1,640-mile, mountainous Afghanistan-Pakistan border, but intelligence officials in Kabul and Islamabad say there has been no trace of him for the past 20 months. By the end of February, the White House is expected to double the sum on bin Laden's head, to \$50 million, acting on legislation passed in November by Congress.

State Department ads began appearing this month in Jang, a widely circulated Pakistani newspaper, offering rewards for bin Laden, his lieutenant Ayman al-Zawahiri, Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar and 11 other suspected terrorists. The ads have elicited an average of 12 responses a day, and will be followed by an advertising barrage on regional radio and TV stations in the borderlands and cities where al-Qaeda's chief might be hiding, according to the State Department.

U.S. reward offers were posted soon after 9/11, but officials concede that little effort was made to circulate the offers widely in the Afghan and Pakistan countryside. Even if a local knew of bin Laden's whereabouts, the informer would face daunting obstacles in contacting U.S. authorities.

The newspaper ads, seen in Pakistani towns, signify a shift in the theory about where bin Laden might be. Congressman Mark Kirk, the Illinois Republican who wrote the bill boosting the reward and who just traveled to Pakistan, says it's possible bin Laden is not in some snowy mountain cave but has melted away into one of the teeming Pakistani cities, as had several other al-Qaeda agents who have been captured. "What we're looking for is some young Pashtun living in a town who knows the value of \$25 million and can figure out how to reach us safely," says Kirk. He points out that the lure of a \$30 million reward led to the capture and killing in Iraq of Saddam Hussein's sons Uday and Qusay.